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## ***Into Thy Word Bible Study in Revelation***

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### **Revelation 15:1-8: “The Seven Plagues”**

**General idea:** John now gets a heavenly perspective of God’s wrath being prepared to be poured out on a wicked world. As seven angels with seven plagues get ready for God to say “go,” they are the last ones unleashed because this concludes God’s wrath. Now, in the midst of the underpinnings for extreme judgment, John is consoled with images depicting peace and hope, a sea of glass, and the people who have been victorious against both the evils of the world and the manipulations of the beast. These victors of faith praise God for His holiness; they have seen His plan revealed and that His plan has prevailed. God is truly beyond marvelous; His previsions and power—His best and true ways—were received. Then, they continue to praise Him who is glorious and worthy; they see their struggles as worth it beyond measure.

The saints celebrate their victory and vindication! As God’s heavenly Temple is opened and revealed, from it come the seven angels dressed in glory and splendor, along with the four living creatures who gave the angels the seven bowls filled with God’s wrath. The Temple is filled with God’s presence, power, and glory, and thus, no one could enter it until the bowls have been poured out and His judgment completed.

**Vs. 1-8, Contexts:** This passage is about the contrast and importance of God and His judgment and grace. They go together and both are essential. The wicked and those who are in apostasy are deserving of their judgments; they bring it on themselves freely as they ignore and refuse God’s offer of grace. This passage is about worship—pointing us to the One who is in control so those who are His can take hope and comfort in Him. These plagues of judgment are reminiscent of the ones with which God challenged Pharaoh to let His people go. God offered peace and grace, but Pharaoh kept hardening his heart over and over, just as the recipients of the bowls of wrath do. Just as God delivered Israel from oppression in Egypt, He will deliver His faithful. This becomes all about God’s faithfulness and glory, and how His plan will triumph. So, John’s readers, as well as we today, can take hope in the realization that there is no reason we should not trust in His sovereignty and plan (Ex. 7-12; 40:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Dan. 7:9-10; John 3:17; Eph. 2; Rev. 4-5).

This passage also starts John’s fourth cycle of visions, this time focusing on the bowls of God’s wrath to those who are evil doers. If you are not evil and manipulative, but are loyal to Christ, you have no worries here (15:1-16:21). These bowls are nothing esoteric or cryptic; they symbolize God’s wrath. The point is, just as God delivered the Israelites from oppression using the plagues against Egypt, so He will deliver those who belong to Him! The other significance of this is that it sets up the world for the Second Coming of Christ (Is. 51:17-22; Jer. 25:15-29; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31-34; Hab. 2:16; Rev. 14:10; 16:19)!

## Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Great and marvelous/wonderful* is a celebration song of hope fulfilled and victory (Is. 6:1-4).
- *Last plagues* refers to "filled up" and completion.
- *God's wrath* refers to the judgment that is coming and that it will be a reality (Joel 2:11; Mal. 3:2). This is something Christians need not fear as Christ covers our sin for us (Zeph. 1:14-18; Nah. 1:6; Mal. 3:2; Rom. 1:18; 3:9-23; 6:23; Rev.19:15). There is hope and assurance when our trust is in Christ and His righteousness. He is our hope, even when the very foundations of the universe are collapsing around and under us. When our hope is in Christ, nothing can shake us (Luke 12:32-34; 1 Cor. 7:29-31; 2 Thess.1:7-9; Heb. 12:25-29; Rev. 6:16).
- *Sea of glass*. This is a representation of worship, as the temple had the "Bronze Sea," referring to the "basin" in the heavenly temple. In context, this also may refer to how Israel was delivered through the parting of the Red Sea, or the "Sea of Reeds" (Rev. 15:5-6, 8; 16:1, 17). Elsewhere, this image of water and worship is found when the Red Sea (Sea of Reeds) was parted by God, as was the Jordan River (which was actually a greater miracle). These images indicate that all that exists is submissive to God's supremacy, and He has victory over all that opposes Him. In conjunction, water also means that He supplies us with all we need so we can take comfort in Him in times of doubt or stress (Ex. 24:10; Deut. 11:11; 1 Kings 7:23-25; 2 Kings 16:17; 2 Chron. 4:2-6,15, 39; Psalm 11:4; Is. 51:9-11; Jer 27:19; Ezek. 1:22; Rev. 4:6-8; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:2).
- *Mixed with fire* refers to God as a consuming fire who delivers the faithful (Deut. 4:24).
- *Been victorious who had conquered* indicates that the faithful have a role in God's judgments to those who persecuted them or have done evil. Perhaps, they will be witnesses and/or their prayers have motivated God. This also means we do not fear the devil when we are in Christ (Rev. 6:9-11; 12:11).
- *Number of his name*. This was also a common way to express a warning to us about godlessness or those opposing Christ—a warning to make sure we are not opposing Christ in thought, word, or deed, taking oaths, or making promises that counter Christ's principles (Rev. 13:11-18).
- *Song of Moses* indicates a song that pictures redemption and hope. Moses sang to praise God for His deliverance and his people's triumph as God led them safely and unharmed from oppression and through danger, and then God "took out" their enemies. This was/is used in Jewish worship on Sabbath evenings to celebrate deliverance. It is also a contrast between being oppressed by evil and the oppression we bring on ourselves by seeking idols and things not of God, and how

He seeks to deliver us. God accepts us; it is we who have trouble accepting Him (Ex. 15:1-18; Deut. 31:28-32:43; Psalm 86:9-10; Rev. 5:6).

- *Song of the Lamb* was an early church hymn pointing to how Christ obtained deliverance because He arose from the dead and triumphed over His enemies (Psalm 22; Phil. 2:9-11).
- *Great and marvelous are your deeds* is another song of praise (Ex. 15:11; Psalm 92:5; 111:2 Rev. 1:8).
- *Just and true* means how God is right and never acts with spite or in unfair anger. His judgments are pure and deserving; it would be a farce and immoral for Him not to judge. Evil would not be contained or accountable, and righteousness and holiness would not mean anything without judgment (Is. 55:6-13; Rev. 16:5-7; 19:2-11).
- *King of the ages/world* is a name for God, referring to His universal right to be recognized as first, foremost, and the only worshiped being (Psalm 86:9-10; Is. 45:22-23; Jer 10:10; Zech. 14:9; Mal. 1:11; Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:17).
- *Tabernacle of the Testimony/Sanctuary* is an image of the Old Testament Tabernacle tent that meant God's heavenly dwelling. It refers to the inner sanctum of God's most holy of holies that contained the Ark with the two tablets of the Testimony Moses brought from Mount Sinai. This represented God's home on earth as a "copy" of God's Throne Room, made for His presence in the inner chamber of Jewish Temples and the Tabernacle that was a tent, used before the Temple was built by Solomon. Now, John sees the *real* heavenly version in a corporal state to condescend to his and our understanding (Ex. 24:9-11; 25:25:40; 32:15; 38:21; Deut 10:5; 1 Kings 5-7; 22:19; 2 Chron. 2-4; Is. 6; Ezek. 1; 10:1; Dan. 7:9-10; Matt. 13:38; John 8:42-45; Heb. 8:1-6; 9:1-14; Rev. 3:12; 4:1; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15-17; 15:5-16:1, 16:17; 21:22).
- *Shining linen/pure bright linen.... golden sashes* refer to the clothing of priests who represent God and His Holiness through their call and priestly occupation. It also refers to how our Lord creates, redeems, and empowers us (Ex. 28:42; Lev. 16:4; Ezek. 18:4).
- *Four living creatures* is a figurative image from Ezekiel and Babylonian descriptions, possibly referring to angels who minister to God, who act as protectors, guardians, and servants, giving their adoration. The point is that "God is Great," God is Holy, He is universally glorious, and He is greater than any earthly power or king. This may also be an assault on the powers and authority of Babylon and Rome. To read into these images more than what is there misses the point of the passage and muddies the waters of Revelation (Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:17-22; 1 Kings 7:29; 1 Chron. 12:8; 28:18; Psalm 18:10; Is. 6; Ezek. Chaps 1, 10; Rev. 4:6).

- *Seven golden bowls/vials* refer to the incense bowls or chalices used in the Jewish Temple. Here, instead of being used to please God, God uses this image to appease His just wrath (Psalm 75:8; Is. 34:10; 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Mark 15:35; Rev. 5:8; 8:3-5; 14:9-10; 16:6,19).
- *Smoke*. In the Old Testament, smoke indicated both God's presence His anger. This is also, in context, an image of God's power and glory filling the Temple when it was dedicated (Ex. 19:9-18; 20:18; 40:34-35; Num. 12:5; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 10:3-4; 44:4; Psalm 18:8-11; 74:1; Is. 6:4; Ezek. 1:4; )
- *From his power* means that our Lord is our Help, and He will never forsake us. From the context of the Song of Moses, this is also a warning to "see if your false gods (apostate, corrupt, weak church) can help you." (Ezek. 18:4; Psalm 37:7, 20, 34; Matt. 10:28-31)
- *No one could enter the temple*. Those who are wicked had their chance; now, they are beyond reclamation.

### **Thoughts and Applications:**

These bowls are very similar to the Seven Trumpets and first Four Bowls, but the first judgments affect one-third (1/3) of the areas; these new ones effect all. Thus they result in more stern judgments after a very clear warning and time for repentance! These judgments can be applied as they were written to the Roman Empire as well as for a time yet to come. Remember, Hebrew logic is not "either-or;" rather, it is "both-and!" Thus, these themes were for John's readers, for us, and for a crisis-tribulation time that is yet to come. The bottom line is not what theories we read in to the passage that tantalize us; rather, it is what God is seeking from us, namely our faith, worship, and faithfulness versus what he is mad at—evil. You can get a list of that from Romans chap 1.

This passage testifies to the fact that a hardened heart refuses to learn, obey, or submit. God accepts us; it is we who have trouble accepting Him! Such a mindset will not recognize pride or sin's folly, nor will it learn from past mistakes. This mindset refuses the things of goodness and God, rather preferring depravity or its own pride and agendas. It can even trick itself that these things are right and good and those who represent the Truth of God are in the wrong. Yes, God still cares and offers Himself to them until the time is up and judgment is poured out. The contrast for the faithful is this; while the wicked refuse to learn or grow, we can take comfort we can be anchored in Christ and be encouraged and then learn from them—learn of the evils and depravity of sin so we can guard ourselves, and do as much as we can to help others get out of it, as our Lord showed us.

The other aspect we can glean from this passage is that God protects and cares for us. God is right and never acts with spite or in unfair anger.

## The Four Prevailing Views

**The Preterist view:** They see this passage as the beginnings of Judgment, the Jewish war of 70 A.D, and the finality of Jerusalem. Thus, it is all about God's wrath toward apostate Jewish leadership while He delivers His faithful. God abolishes the Old Covenant and sets up the Covenant of Grace under Christ. The celebration is seen as the rejoicing of the faithful for their vindication and/or escape from Jerusalem, and/or how Jesus delivers His people. Others see this as the joy of martyrdom. The corrupt, wicked city of Jerusalem has had its chance, but now it is beyond recovery.

**The Futurist view:** They see this passage as anticipation of a new Temple being built to execute God's new mission to humanity. His mission is climatic judgment. Most in this camp see this not as God's Temple, but the one in Jerusalem that will be rebuilt. (There is a common misconception in "end times" theory that the temple must be rebuilt before Jesus can come back. This is just not true. The verses used to make this point are taken out of their historical context. The passages refer to the end of the Babylonian captivity and how the Temple was going to be rebuilt, which had already been fulfilled in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah! Thus, there is confusion between already fulfilled prophecy and not understanding the Old Testament and its connection to unfilled and fulfilled prophecy from historical chronology. The teaching that the sacrificial system must also be reinstated is an assault to the Person and work of Christ. There are no conditions for Christ to come again; He comes when He is ready to come! ) *Sea of glass* is a picture of heaven and the *fire* is God's judgment. There is a big problem for this view as the *great victory*, when most believe the church was raptured; so, who is victorious? There are many theories; either this refers to the people who come to Christ after the rapture or else it does not refer to the Church but rather to the disembodied spirits of the people killed, which is a contradiction of how God deals with death. Others see this as the song from the Red Sea still being heard or the song of redemption echoing from God's faithful. This could also be interpreted as a reminder of God's faithfulness and His ability to redeem, or a last warning before final judgment.

Passages saying the temple has to be rebuilt that are often taken out of context: Numbers 19:2; Isaiah 14:1-2; Jeremiah 7:2-8; Ezekiel 34; Daniel 3:1-7; 8; 9:24-27; 12:11; Haggai 1:1-11; 2:14, 1 Cor. 6:19; Gal. 4:25 -26; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 2:4; 3:7; 1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 11:2-6. The original Temple in Solomon's time was built in (dates approximate) 950 B.C. and destroyed in 587 B.C. (1 Kings 8:22-61; 2 Kings 24:11-15; 2 Kings 25:7-12). Said passages point to its rebuilding and thus were fulfilled with Ezra's Temple 515 B.C. (Ezra 5:2). Also, Herod's Temple, built in 20 B.C. and destroyed in 70 A.D fulfilled Daniel's "abomination that causes desolation," and Christ, the Messiah fulfilled "the anointed One" (Matthew, chapters 21-24; Acts 6:12 - 7:60). There is no scriptural evidence for a "tribulation temple" (see Revelation 11 study), although if one is built, (I am surprised it has not been already), it has no bearing on Christ's timing or His return.

**The Idealist view:** They see this passage as the last judgment on humanity and the end of time as we know it. God's goals and purposes are fulfilled and complete, and humanity's purpose is at its fruition. Others in this camp see this as individual judgments

to one's own personal life experiences and choices as compared to opportunities, call, and abilities. *Fire* is seen as God's righteousness and *glass* as heaven. The song is that all nations shall worship Christ as Lord.

**The Historicist view:** They see this passage as symbolic, meant to give the Church hope and reassurance that God is in control and His purpose will be fulfilled. They also see this passage as God's assault on the corrupt papacy (Medieval Catholic Popes who persecuted faithful Christian reformers). They see this happening in God's throne room represented by the *Sea of glass*, and the *fire* as His judgment. The *great victory* indicates the "faithful," those who remained steadfast during papal persecutions. The *seven plagues* are seen as the end of secular history and the start of the return of Christ as the events of earthly life come to an end. Others in this camp see this as the French revolution and/or the destruction of Rome.

***The Essential Inductive Questions*** (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

***Additional Questions:***

1. How would you symbolize God's wrath? How do you like to celebrate victory? How do you like to get vindication?
2. If you were in the midst of extreme judgment for your sins and did not have Christ, how would you feel? How do you suppose other people would feel?
3. What images could console you in times of stress? How would you describe peace and hope to someone in distress?
4. How have you praised God for His holiness? How can you do this better? How would you feel and receive hope if God revealed His personal plan for you so you knew for certain you would prevail in your life?
5. If you knew for certain that your struggles were worth it beyond measure, how would that instill more confidence in you? Now, consider that God's purpose and track

record is to free the oppressed and deliver His faithful. Moreover, consider that God's faithfulness and glory and plan will triumph! How do you feel now?

6. How would you describe to a non-Christian the contrast and importance of God's judgment and grace? How do they go together, as both are essential?
7. Does judgment seem more palatable to you when you realize that the wicked are deserving of their judgments and bring it on themselves freely? Why would someone who is being judged ignore and refuse God's offer of grace?
8. What can you do to see hope even when the very foundations of the universe are collapsing around and under you? Why and how is your hope in Christ, knowing that nothing can shake you?
9. How can you contrast being oppressed by evil with the oppression we bring on ourselves by seeking idols and the things not of God? How can building a protective hedge from sin be better accomplished when you see how He seeks to deliver you?
10. How and why does a hardened heart refuse to learn or obey or submit? What can you do to prevent such a mindset from encroaching on you? How does not recognizing pride and sin's folly or learning from our mistakes fuel sin and problems in our lives?
11. Who is in control of your spiritual life? What needs to take place for you to take more hope and comfort in Christ?
12. What can you and your church do to praise Christ—who is glorious and worthy—more passionately and faithfully? How would this help you and the people in your church be more victorious against the evils of the world and the stresses of life?